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1 December 1964

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Developments in Venezuela

1. President-elect Raul Leoni won Sunday's election by a plurality of only about one third of the electorate. He faces the immediate problem of trying to work out a coalition with one or more of the other parties, since his Democratic Action Party will not have a majority in the new Congress. Leoni will be working under tougher circumstances than the popular and dynamic President Betancourt.

2. Terrorists earlier threatened a "blood bath" if Leoni should win, and there has been talk in the military of a coup if the elections did not give Leoni at least a high plurality. Since the terrorists were unable to sabotage the elections, they can be expected to concentrate their efforts in the next few months in an attempt to prevent Leoni's inauguration on 2 March 1964. Moscow has recently joined Castro in increased propaganda against Betancourt and in labeling the elections as fake.

3. Violence in the near future will probably be similar to the intensive but unsuccessful efforts during November to sabotage the elections. Throughout the month their main targets were police and military installations and personnel, and political parties and their candidates, headquarters, and rallies. Public transportation and communication facilities, commercial enterprises, and particularly US-owned firms were also threatened and attacked.

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4. Four spectacular terrorist acts in the latter half of November are worth special note. On 25 November, five different oil pipelines and the largest Mene Grande oil storage tank in the Maricao area of eastern Venezuela were blown up, causing great damage. On 26 November, packages containing bombs were sent to the chief presidential candidates and to a US Embassy officer. On 27 November, Lt. Col. James K. Chenault, deputy chief of the US army mission, was kidnaped and has not yet been returned. An offer to exchange him for 70 "political prisoners" now in Venezuelan jails was refused by President Betancourt on 30 November. On 28 November, six terrorists hijacked an Avensa airliner, dropped propaganda leaflets over Ciudad Bolivar, and forced the pilot to land the plane in Trinidad. The Trinidad government arrested the hijackers on arrival and later turned them over to Venezuelan authorities for trial.

5. Against this background of terrorist activity, the Venezuelan Government on 28 November publicized the discovery of a three-ton terrorist arms cache, worth approximately \$350,000, on a beach in Falcon State on 3 November. A small launch was also found with the arms. Intensive investigations [redacted] yielded incontrovertible evidence that the weapons were of Cuban origin. [redacted]

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6. This event has led Venezuela to accuse Cuba of aggression and interference in its internal affairs. In a meeting on 3 December, the OAS decided to investigate Venezuela's charges. There are some reports that Venezuela later intends to seek some kind of multinational action to choke off support from Cuba for Communist and ultraleftist groups in Latin America.

7. Partly in an effort to ease the situation for the new president after his inauguration in March, the present government is taking steps aimed

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at reducing guerrilla strength as much as possible. The Venezuelan Army, for example, plans at once to initiate a campaign of two to three months' duration with the purpose of both cleaning out all guerrilla forces in western Venezuela and of preventing extremists who are dissatisfied with the election results from joining the guerrilla bands. By 4 December it had already been reported that in an anti-guerrilla operation, the army surprised a guerrilla band in the Falcon Mountains of western Venezuela, killing 20 guerrillas including their leader, a notorious Castro-terrorist.